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New tool will allow the blind, visually impaired to scan text

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NEWS RELEASE

Nov. 26, 2007

Contact: Jim Marks, director of UM Disability Services for Students, jim.marks@umontana.edu.

NEW TOOL WILL ALLOW THE BLIND, VISUALLY IMPAIRED TO SCAN TEXT

MISSOULA—

A tool designed to make Microsoft Word documents more accessible and enhance the reading experience for people with print disabilities will be released as a downloadable plug-in early next year.

The plug-in will translate Open XML documents into DAISY XML, the globally accepted language standard for digital talking books. It will allow the blind and visually impaired to navigate text, parse information, speed-read, skim over sections and locate data – much like the eye scans a page of text.

Jim Marks, University of Montana's director of Disability Services, and George Kerscher are featured in a news release about the plug-in on the Microsoft Web site. Kerscher, secretary general of the DAISY Consortium, received an honorary doctorate from UM last spring.

DAISY Consortium is a coalition of talking-book libraries and nonprofit organizations formed in 1996. DAISY-formatted files enable users to scroll through auditory content using simple keystrokes to hone in on specific sections.

"When you don't see print, you lose more than the ability to read words," said Marks, who lost his sight as an undergraduate in the early 1980s. "You lose the ability to see the page,

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jump around in the text and be drawn to bolded or italicized information.

“When I switched from the ability to read print to audio, trying to find the page number on an audio cassette was a miserable experience,” he said. “DAISY enhances the reading experience to most closely approximate how sighted people read print.”

“It gives you the power to be a sophisticated reader,” said Kerscher, adding that DAISY’s specifications have been shaped by feedback from talking book users and the spectrum of needs they identified.

For more information, visit <http://www.microsoft.com/presspass> and click on the news release about Microsoft and Daisy toward the bottom of the page.

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